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A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan [Review]

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Heather J. Sharkey's review of *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan* by Eve M. Troutt Powell.

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A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan [Review]

Abstract

In *A Different Shade of Colonialism*, Eve M. Troutt Powell examines Egypt's ambiguous relationship with the Sudan in the period from approximately 1800 to the late 1920s. She suggests that this relationship was complicated by Egypt's position as a "colonized colonizer" - that is, as an imperial power in the Nile Valley which itself became vulnerable first to French and later to British colonialism. Powell focuses on Sudan- or Sudanese-related commentaries by key Egyptian thinkers, including travelers, journalists, and others, many of whom (such as Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, Mustafa Kamil, and Huda Sha'rawi) played prominent roles in the making of modern Egypt.

Disciplines

African History | African Languages and Societies | Islamic World and Near East History | Near Eastern Languages and Societies | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies

Comments

Heather J. Sharkey's review of *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan* by Eve M. Troutt Powell.

and an array of other factors, which are assiduously chronicled, meant that the Ottoman Army was ill prepared to face determined land-grabbing Balkan opponents attacking on several fronts. Erickson's main conclusion is that the Ottoman Army was defeated in detail as isolated pockets were surrounded. A critical mistake was to try to defend all territory, which diluted the effectiveness of the military response that Turkey could muster. The situation was compounded by faulty intelligence, not to mention Greek supremacy at sea. The Greek capture of Salonika, just ahead of the equally aggrandized Bulgars, is convincingly shown to be a decisive event.

As Erickson demonstrates, it is a mistake to see Ottoman military performance in 1912-13 as simply a catalogue of disasters. There was much here that could be carried forwards and developed, as it was in the First World War. The British were persuaded to write off "Johnny Turk" with disastrous consequences in 1915. The Germans were more astute and recognized the continued value of maintaining their politico-military relationship with Constantinople to present the British with a truly world war to stretch their fighting resources. An expanded German military mission followed the Balkan Wars, at Turkey's request. This proved a mixed blessing. Erickson suggests that the German emphasis on attack did not serve the Turks well in the Balkan Wars and that they would have been better off adopting a defensive strategy. That lesson was about to be learnt elsewhere.

Anyone seeking a diplomatic history of the Balkan Wars and their ramifications for the immediate origins of World War I should look elsewhere. But as a campaigns history this volume is hard to fault. It builds its case brick by brick, and the sectionalized approach renders it easy to follow. Highly recommended.

*Steven Morewood, Institute of
Archaeology & Antiquity, University of
Birmingham, UK*

A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan, by Eve M. Troutt Powell. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003. xi + 220 pages. Illustrations. Notes to p. 240. Works cited to p. 250. Index to p. 260. \$65 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

Reviewed by Heather J. Sharkey

In *A Different Shade of Colonialism*, Eve M. Troutt Powell examines Egypt's ambiguous relationship with the Sudan in the period from approximately 1800 to the late 1920s. She suggests that this relationship was complicated by Egypt's position as a "colonized colonizer" — that is, as an imperial power in the Nile Valley which itself became vulnerable first to French and later to British colonialism. Powell focuses on Sudan- or Sudanese-related commentaries by key Egyptian thinkers, including travelers, journalists, and others, many of whom (such as Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi, Mustafa Kamil, and Huda Sha'rawi) played prominent roles in the making of modern Egypt.

Whereas Egyptians often cast themselves in the role of civilizing agents who had a mission to play in the Nile Valley, they often portrayed Sudanese as slaves and servants: this Powell shows after consulting a wide spectrum of 19th and early 20th century Arabic texts that range from fictional and non-fictional narratives to dialogue sequences in stories and plays, and even to political cartoons. These texts recurrently and stereotypically characterized the Sudanese as sexually licentious, coarse and half-naked, and alternately passionate and dull-witted — namely, with traits that were the opposite of educated, rational refinement. Thus presented, the Sudanese offered ideal material for Egyptian civilizational tutelage and boosted Egyptian cultural and political morale, particularly after the British occupation of 1882 when Egypt became informally colonized.

Scholars and students of modern Egyptian history will find *A Different Shade of*

Colonialism to be a fascinating and thought-provoking study. For a start, it is methodologically creative in marshaling literary texts for the study of Egyptian social and cultural history. It also presents an intriguing critique of imperialism in the region, by demonstrating that it operated not merely on an Occident-Orient (or in this case Britain-Egypt) model, but also according to local patterns of domination, as evinced by the rights and relations that Egyptians asserted (or tried to assert) *vis-à-vis* the Sudan. Indeed, Egyptian nationalists in the early 20th century continued to evoke claims that went back to 1820 when the armies of Muhammad Ali had first conquered Sudanese territories.

As a history of Egyptian thought about the Sudan, *A Different Shade of Colonialism* is not a history of the Sudan itself. The description of the whole Mahdist era (1881-1898) as a period of "rebellion" (p. 12), for example, reflects an Egyptian view of the region's history that is at variance with most Sudan-centered interpretations of the period's local significance. Nevertheless, from the Sudanese history perspective, Powell's exposure of Egyptian attitudes towards Sudanese peoples does provide valuable material for understanding Sudanese-Egyptian relations in the 20th century, particularly with regard to the issue of Nile Valley nationalism (rooted in notions of Egyptian-Sudanese cultural and political unity). Historians of the Sudan have long acknowledged the major impact that Egyptian journalism and literature had on early Sudanese nationalism, the prominence of Egypt as a source of new ideas among educated Arabic-speaking Sudanese, and the importance of pro-Egyptian political sentiments among some segments of the northern Sudanese population. But the limits of Egypt's appeal to early Sudanese nationalists become more clear thanks to Powell's book. Paternalistic at best, insulting and belittling at worst, the attitudes of Egypt's leading intellectuals towards the Sudanese clearly restricted possibilities for genuine political partnership in the early- and mid-

20th century. Even those northern Sudanese thinkers who were most enthusiastic about the idea of Nile Valley unity realized, by Sudanese independence in 1956, that this fine theory had practical constraints.

Heather J. Sharkey, Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Pennsylvania, is the author of Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (University of California Press, 2003).

PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam: Theory and Practice, by Mohammed Abu-Nimer. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003. ix + 186 pages. Notes to p. 211. Index to p. 233. \$55.

Reviewed by Karen Abi-Ezzi

In the wake of 9/11 and the invasion and occupation of Iraq by the United States and Great Britain, and the often flippant, cursory, and dangerous way in which Islam and Muslims are portrayed in the United States and much of the West, with "bookstores in the US [—] filled with screeds bearing screaming headlines about Islam and terror," this book provides a reasoned and well explained counter-discourse, which pushes out the suffocatingly closed parameters of debate, to create a space for voices which have so far been marginalized or altogether silenced in the West.¹ As such, *Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam: Theory and Practice* is a welcome and very timely book

1. Edward Said, "A Window on the World," essay published in the Review section of *The Guardian*, August 2, 2003, p. 4.